

## **WINNER: 1<sup>st</sup> prize: Brave Words by Kate Steele**

'No I can't Tony, I already have plans...' The line went dead.

Tony's hands gripped the steering wheel, his knuckles white with rage. How dare she reject him like this? Why didn't women appreciate his love? Why could they never learn?

It had begun in mundane circumstances, reaching for the same meal-for-one in the chiller cabinet of the service station. Their intended purchase spoke volumes about their personal circumstances. Emily thought destiny had intervened to end her loneliness.

At first Tony had delighted Emily with a whirlwind of moonlit picnics, expensive gifts and weekends away. Emily had never been valued like this before - it felt like a kind of worship, a 'movie love' not for ordinary mortals.

She discovered too late the fine line between worship and obsession. Slowly it became clear that Tony's romantic spontaneity was a disguise for his desire to control and guard a possession that he considered to be exclusively his.

Tony arrived at Emily's house, letting himself in with the key she had given him. The keyring had a picture of them both, smiling complacently into an unseen future.

It took Tony less than ten minutes to teach Emily not to say no to him again.

When she came to consciousness Emily searched for her phone amongst the shattered glass of her dream of love. She spat blood, and could barely see the digits to dial.

'Police please...' but then the brave words failed her.

Like Tony's other victims, she had been silenced.